

Dalabon language

Dalabon is a Gunwinyguan language of Arnhem Land, Australia. It is a severely endangered language,^[3] with perhaps as few as three fluent speakers remaining as of 2018.^[4] Dalabon is also known as Dangbon (the Kune or Mayali name), Ngalkbun (the Jawoyn name), and Buwan (the Rembarrnga name).^[2]

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Classification

Dalabon belongs to the Gunwinyguan languages branch of the Australian languages, its nearest relatives are Kunwinjku, Kune, Mayali (varieties often grouped together as Bininj Kunwok) and Kunbarlang. Its next closest relatives are Rembarrnga, and other languages within the Gunwinyguan family, including Jawoyn, Ngalakgan, Ngandi, Wubuy, and Enindhilyakwa.

Official status

Dalabon has no official status. Local schools spent years to hold sporadic programs teaching Dalabon, but these operations didn't receive enough governmental support. Therefore, the condition of programs is still vulnerable.

Dialect/Varieties

Given the limited number of Dalabon speakers, the study of dialects has become challenging to investigate. Speakers recall a distinction between two different types of speech, dalabon-djurrkdjurrk ("fast", "lively") and dalabon-murduk ("articulate"). However, no significant difference has been found between the two speeches.

Dalabon	
Ngalkbun	
Native to	Australia
Region	Arnhem Land
Ethnicity	Dangbon = Dalabon
Native speakers	3 (2018)
Language family	Macro-Gunwinyguan? <div> <div>Gunwinyguan</div> <div>Marne</div> <div>Central Gunwinyguan</div> <div>Dalabon</div> </div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	ngk
Glottolog	ngal1292 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/ngal1292) ^[1]
AIATSIS ^[2]	N60 (https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/language/N60)
<div><div> <div></div> <div></div> </div><div>  </div></div>	
Coordinates: 13.98°S 133.94°E	

Phonology and Orthography

Consonants

There are 22 or 23 phonemic consonants in Dalabon, depending on the phonemic status of /h/. A table containing the consonant phonemes is given below with their orthographic representation (in angle brackets).

Dalabon consonant phonemes

		Peripheral		Apico-		Lamino-Palatal	Glottal
		Velar	Bilabial	Alveolar	Retroflex		
Stops	Lenis (short)	⟨k⟩ /k̥/	⟨b⟩ /p/	⟨d⟩ t̪	⟨rd⟩ /ɽ̪/	⟨dj⟩ /c̪/	⟨h⟩ /ʔ/
	Fortis (long)	⟨kk⟩ /k̪ː/	⟨bb⟩ /p̪ː/	⟨dd⟩ /t̪ː/	⟨rdd⟩ /ɽ̪ː/	⟨djj⟩ /c̪ː/	
Nasal		⟨ng⟩ /ŋ/	⟨m⟩ /m̪/	⟨n⟩ /n̪/	⟨rn⟩ /ɳ̪/	⟨nj⟩ /ɲ̪/	
Lateral				⟨l⟩ /l̪/	⟨rl⟩ /ɭ̪/		
Rhotic				⟨rr⟩ /r̪/	⟨r⟩ /ɻ̪/		
Semi-vowel			⟨w⟩ /w̪/			⟨y⟩ /j̪/	
Fricatives							⟨H⟩ (/h̪/)

Vowels

There are 6 vowels in Dalabon. A table containing the vowel phonemes is given below with their orthographic representation (in angle brackets).

Dalabon vowel phonemes

	Front	Central	Back
High	⟨i⟩ /i̪/	⟨û⟩ /ɨ̪/	⟨u⟩ /u̪/
mid	⟨e⟩ /e̪/		⟨o⟩ /o̪/
low		⟨a⟩ /a̪/	

Phonotactics

Dalabon restricts the trilled [r] and long stops to only occur word-internally. Constraints regarding the edges of a phonological word also limit the glottal stop [ʔ] from occurring word-initially.

The syllable structure of Dalabon is CV(C)(C)(C), or more specifically:

CV(L)(N)(h) or CV(L)(S)

where:

- L is a liquid consonant (lateral or rhotic)
- N is a nasal consonant
- S is a peripheral consonant
- h is a glottal consonant.

Such complex codas are not unusual, and all combinations are enumerated as follows (words and translations taken from the dictionary^[5]).

Complex coda of two consonants

C1 C2	_k	_b	_ng	_h
l_	<i>yalkngalk</i> /jalk.ŋalk/ "native bee sp."	<i>kolb</i> /kolp/ "sound of spear slotting into <u>spearthrower</u> "	<i>kalngbuy</i> /kalŋ.buj/ "initiation ritual"	<i>kolh-no</i> /kolʔ.no/ "liquid, water"
rl_	<i>borlkmû</i> /boʔk.mɛ̃/ "(to) fall out"	<i>borlbmû</i> /boʔp.mɛ̃/ "(to) be accustomed to"		<i>lurlh(mû)</i> /luʔʔ(.mɛ̃)/ "hop of a <u>riverine wallaby</u> "
rr_	<i>kerrkban</i> /kerk.ban/ "(to) dodge"	<i>yang-warrbmû</i> /jaŋ.warp.mɛ̃/ "(to) tell lies"	<i>marrngkidj</i> /marŋ.kic/ "sorcerer, <u>clever man</u> "	<i>bukarrh</i> /bu.karʔ/ "top (of something)"
r_	<i>berk</i> /beʔk/ " <u>deaf adder</u> "	<i>wirbmang</i> /wiʔp.man/ "(to) pull out from flesh"	<i>kerng-no</i> /keʔŋ.no/ "jaw"	<i>warhdû</i> /waʔʔ.dɛ̃/ "devil, <u>white person</u> "
ng_				<i>wanjingh</i> /wa.ŋiŋʔ/ " <u>one</u> "
m_				<i>ŋjimhmû</i> /ŋimʔ.mɛ̃/ "(to) wink"
n_				<i>kanh</i> /kanʔ/ " <u>this</u> (identified)"
rn_				<i>nornhnornh</i> /noŋʔnoŋʔ/ "stone axe"
nj_				<i>keninjhbî</i> /ke.niŋʔ.bi/ " <u>whatsit</u> , <u>whosit</u> "

Complex coda of three consonants

C1	C2,C3	_ngh
l_		<i>kaInghmû /kaInghmɛ̃/</i> "(to) climb"
rl_		<i>njorInghmû /noʔŋʔmɛ̃/</i> "(to) gobble up"
rr_		<i>ngarnarrngh /ŋaŋaŋʔ/</i> " <u>marble tree</u> "
r_		<i>modjarrngh /mocaʔŋʔ/</i> " <u>ground honey</u> "

Phonological processes

Dalabon has a pattern of eliding unstressed vowels and unstressed syllables. For example, the word /'cabale/ 'shoulder blade' is often realized as ['cable].^[6]

Prosody

The location of phrasal stress in Dalabon appears one or two peaks with an initial rise into the first peak at the left edge of the constituent and a final fall at the right edge of the constituent.^[7]

Grammar

Although there is no complete grammatical description of the language, a number of aspects of Dalabon grammar have been described, including its bound pronominal system^[8], polysynthetic word structure^[9], verb conjugations^[10], the use of subordination strategies^[11], nominal subclasses^[12], the demonstrative system^[13], and the use of optional ergativity^[14].

Morphology

The structure of Dalabon verbs:^[15]

-12	-11	-10	-9	-8	-7	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
Obj pron	Subj pron	SURB	SEQ	CAUS	MISC	BEN/INST	MISC	GIN	BPIN	NUM	COM	STEM	RR	TAM	Case

SEQ: sequential 'and then'

CAUS: 'because'

misc: various adverbial type prefixes

BEN: benefactive applicative

gin: 'generic' incorporated nouns

bpin: 'body part' incorporated nouns

num: 'number' prefixes

COM: comitative applicative

RR: Reflexive/reciprocal

TAM: tense/aspect mood

The diminutive enclitic =*wurd* is derived from noun *wurd* 'woman's child', its reduplication *wurdurd* means 'child'. *wurd* can attach to most word classes and functions in 3 ways of meaning: to denote small objects, to add emotional connotations and to serve as pragmatic functions (especially for interactional softening). The examples are shown below.^[16]

1. to denote small objects

Bad-dulum-no=wurd kanidjah ka-h-di.
stone-hill-fill=dim there 3sg-r-stand/be.prs
'There is a small stone hill there.'

2. to add emotional connotations

Wa:h ka-h-rakka-ng=wurd.
interj 3sg-r-fall-pfv=dim
'Oh, he fell over poor fellow.'

Syntax

Dalabon is a head-marking language. Dalabon has limited use of subordinate clauses, but it has a distinctive subordination strategy, which is to attach pronominal prefixes to the verb, and marked verbs are used for subordinate clause functions^[17]

Pronominal Prefixes	Subordinate1	Subordinate2
1sg	<i>nga-</i>	<i>ngaye-</i>
2sg	<i>dja-</i>	<i>djaya-</i>
3sg	<i>ka-</i>	<i>kaye-</i>
1dis	<i>nge-</i>	<i>ngey-</i>
3dis	<i>ke-</i>	<i>key-</i>
3du	<i>barra-</i>	<i>barre-</i>
3pl	<i>bala-</i>	<i>bale-</i>

subordinate1: the unmarked form of prefixes to show subordinate status, used when the status is overt by other means.

subordinate2: used when prefixes are the only way to show subordination.

dis: disharmonic, meaning odd-numbered generations.

Examples are shown below:

(1)**bala**-buh-ngong+boyenj-ni-nj mahkih

3pl-because-mob+big-be-PP because
'..because there were so many of them.'

(2)yila-h-yang-wona-wona-n **yale**-yu-yu.

1pl/3-R-voice-REDUP-hear-PRES 1pl.SURB2-REDUP-sleepP
'we heard his(dingo's) voice as we were sleeping.'

(3) karrkkany ka-h-ngun **kaye**-do-n.

hawk.sp. 3/3l-P-eatPRES 3SURB2-die-PRES
'the hawk eats animals that die.'

Vocabulary

Dalabon	Gloss	Dalabon	Gloss	Dalabon	Gloss
<i>bim</i>	"picture"	<i>kolh-no</i>	"liquid"	<i>wadda</i>	"home, house, camp"
<i>biyi</i>	"man(men)"	<i>kung</i>	"honey"	<i>wah</i>	"water"
<i>bonj</i>	"O.K."	<i>kunj</i>	"kangaroo"	<i>walu-no</i>	"the absolute law"
<i>boyenj</i>	"big"	<i>labbarl</i>	"waterhole"	<i>wirridjih</i>	"taboo(s)"
<i>burrama</i>	"good, healthy"	<i>langu</i>	"hand/finger"	<i>wokan</i>	"speak, talk, tell, name, evoke, communicate"
<i>dabarngh</i>	"yesterday"	<i>mah</i>	"also"	<i>wol</i>	"flame"
<i>dengu-no</i>	"foot/toe"	<i>mambard</i>	"billycan"	<i>wurdurd</i>	"child(children)"
<i>djihkun</i>	"spoon"	<i>marrumbu</i>	"lover"	<i>wurhwurrungu</i>	"the elders"
<i>dulum</i>	"hill"	<i>men-no</i>	"conscience, the thoughts of a living creature"	<i>yabok</i>	"sister"
<i>kardu</i>	"maybe"	<i>mey</i>	"(veget.) food"	<i>yang</i>	"language, speech, what one says"
<i>kakkak-no</i>	"grandkin"	<i>murduk</i>	"hard/strong"	<i>yidjnja</i>	"have"
<i>kenbo</i>	"later"	<i>nayunghyungki</i>	"mythical ancestors"		
<i>kinikun</i>	"different"	<i>ngalyurr</i>	"thunder"		
<i>kirdikird</i>	"woman(women)"	<i>ngarrk</i>	"ache"		
<i>kirribruk</i>	"true, real, honest, fair, generous"	<i>Ngurrurdu</i>	"emu"		

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External links

- [Bibliography of Dalabon people and language resources \(http://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/collections/language_bibs/dalabon_dangbon.pdf\)](http://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/collections/language_bibs/dalabon_dangbon.pdf), at the [Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies](#)
 - [Dalabon collection \(https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI548508\)](https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Collection/MPI548508) at the [Endangered Languages Archive](#)
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